

Preventive Health & Health Services Block Grant

An Essential Public Health Resource 2005



“The PHHS Block Grant is the only source of funding for a range of disease interventions that are important to the public but which do not have designated funding. It also allows states to address the underlying causes of the major chronic disease killers—cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer.”

*J. Nick Baird, MD
Director
Ohio Department of Health*

The Role of Block Grant Funding

In 1981, Congress authorized the Preventive Health & Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant. The PHHS Block Grant gives its 61 grantees (50 states, the District of Columbia, 2 American Indian tribes, and 8 U.S. territories) the autonomy and flexibility to tailor prevention and health promotion programs to their particular public health needs. States are expected to align their programs with *Healthy People 2010* national health goals. This critical public health resource is used to

- Address basic health issues such as water fluoridation, food safety, and preventing falls among the elderly.
- Respond rapidly to emerging health threats in states.
- Fund critical prevention efforts to address specific health issues such as skin cancer, child safety restraints, and untreated dental decay that lack categorical state funding.
- Protect investments in and increase the effectiveness of categorically funded programs that address specific health problems.
- Leverage small amounts of money for greater impact.

Flexible Funding for Public Health Efforts

As states continue to undergo significant budget cuts, they must make every dollar count to meet the needs of their populations. The PHHS Block Grant allows states to target

PHHS Block Grants, Fiscal Year 2004

- 71% filled gaps in critical public health activities funded through other federal and state resources.
- 25% provided the only funding to address a priority health problem.
- 4% helped to start new projects.
- 1% allowed rapid responses to emerging public health problems.

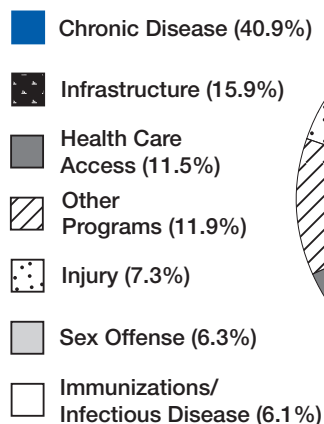
funds to address chronic diseases such as diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, and stroke or to direct funds to meet the challenges of outbreaks of infectious diseases such as SARS and West Nile Virus.

Funding Local Communities

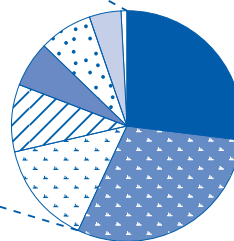
The PHHS Block Grant is a significant source of funding for health promotion and disease and injury prevention in communities across the nation. A large percentage of these funds are distributed by states to local governments and organizations to address local public health problems. In Maryland, for example, the PHHS Block Grant provides 100% of the funding for local programs to address shaken baby syndrome, a leading cause of brain injury to infants.

PHHS Block Grant Funding, Fiscal Year 2004

By Health Program



Chronic Disease Programs



By Chronic Disease Program

In Massachusetts, the PHHS Block Grant funds a community health program that immunizes refugees and immigrants for hepatitis B, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases. It also supports a program that promotes and administers flu shots to older adults.

Leveraging Block Grant Funds

PHHS Block Grant funds also have provided start-up money for programs that now are supported by other sources. These programs have become self-sustaining, which allows PHHS Block Grant funds to be redirected to other public health priorities. For example, New Jersey started its prostate cancer outreach and education program with \$250,000 from the PHHS Block Grant. The program currently receives \$900,000 in state funds each year for outreach, education, and screening.

Rhode Island used PHHS Block Grant funds to start several programs to promote physical activity and work site wellness. These programs now receive extensive in-kind support from private organizations. In Connecticut, state funds fully support the Occupational Health Program and the Water Supplies Program, both of which were started with PHHS Block Grants.

CDC's Leadership Role

CDC plays a vital role in ensuring that states are accountable for the use of funds and that state block grant coordinators have the necessary knowledge and skills.

Developing the Electronic Grant Application and Reporting System (GARS)

The PHHS Block Grant legislation changed in 1994 to require states to submit a state plan that includes selected health objectives from *Healthy People 2000/2010*, descriptions of health problems, target populations, and planned activities. To help track states' progress toward achieving their objectives, CDC worked with the states to develop the electronic Grant Application and Reporting System (GARS). This accountability tool helps to focus interventions on specific health problems and ensure that grantees are responsible for outcomes.

GARS software can perform the following functions:

- Tie award amounts to national *Healthy People 2010* objectives and establish state-level health status objectives that reflect national goals.
- Describe health problems and their associated target populations.

Meeting Health Care Needs When No Other Funds Exist

In Puerto Rico, the PHHS Block Grant is being used to address a leading public health problem—the high rate of diabetes among Hispanics. In 2003, the grant provided the sole funding for a pilot health literacy intervention called Know Your Health. This intervention targeted people with type 2 diabetes who live in three socially isolated and economically disadvantaged communities in Puerto Rico. Know Your Health sought to improve participants' knowledge of the disease, their diet and physical activity levels, and their ability to manage their own blood sugar levels and perform self-evaluations. After completing the four required educational sessions, participants' knowledge about diabetes had increased by 15.7%, and their blood glucose levels had improved as well. In addition, a follow-up survey indicated that participants' visits to emergency rooms for diabetes complications had decreased by 35%. Since 2003, the Know Your Health project has expanded to 30 additional communities. As of January 2005, a total of 850 people with type 2 diabetes had participated.

- Describe impact and outcome objectives.
- Allow states to relate program activities to public health's 10 essential services, as identified by the Institute of Medicine.
- Allow states to identify the PHHS Block Grant's role in funding health priorities.
- Enable states to complete an electronic annual report that describes changes in health objectives and progress toward completing program activities.

"In Connecticut, the PHHS Block Grant funds a program called Become a NorWalker, which promotes physical activity. One of the program's themes, 'Dog Tired? Get Moving,' uses a promotional piece with an exhausted dog sprawled on a couch. This program has reached and motivated many people in the Norwalk area for a relatively small amount of money."

*Eugene Nichols, Health Program Associate
Cardiovascular Health Program
Connecticut Department of Public Health*

The PHHS Block Grant in Action

The following examples show how the PHHS Block Grant has played a critical role in supporting and improving the public's health in 2004.

Oklahoma Reduces Health Insurance Claims and Risk for Heart Disease and Diabetes

The Oklahoma state government is the state's largest employer. In 2002, the state spent more than \$50.5 million on costs associated with cardiovascular disease and \$13.3 million on costs associated with diabetes for employees enrolled in the state's insurance plan. To help lower these costs, the PHHS Block Grant funded the OKHealth Project to reduce state employees' risks of developing cardiovascular disease or diabetes and to help people with these diseases manage them more effectively. Employees were assessed during January 2003 through August 2004, and those with or at risk for these diseases were assigned mentors and placed in a Web-based, self-management program.

Results were impressive. On average, participants lowered their total blood cholesterol levels by 33 points, decreased their triglycerides by 58 points, and lost 8 pounds. In addition, initial results indicated that the program reduced participants' risk for cardiovascular disease 20% and their risk for diabetes 11%. State insurance claims also fell 14.3%.

Block Grant Money Supports Missouri's Emergency Medical Services

Each year, Missouri reports more than 643,000 ambulance runs. Of these runs, more than 44,000 involve a life-threatening illness or injury, and 5,000 involve children and youth under age 21. The PHHS Block Grant funds approximately 60% of Missouri's emergency medical services (EMS) budget. A portion of these funds are used to ensure that the special needs of children are fully addressed in pediatric protocols and that state ambulances have pediatric-sized equipment. These funds also support Missouri's basic EMS needs, including the inspection of 215 ambulance services, 93% of which are equipped to provide advanced life support. In addition, the money funds the state's Unit of Emergency Medical Services, which oversees licensing for the thousands of emergency medical technicians working in Missouri.

Alabama Uses Block Grant Funds to Reduce Waterborne Diseases

In rural Alabama, about 340,000 low-income residents who get their water from private wells are at risk of developing waterborne diseases because of failing septic tanks. The PHHS Block Grant pays for state officials to examine private wells and to review the results of all samples analyzed in state laboratories. These activities allow investigations and corrective actions to be implemented quickly. As a result, no outbreaks of waterborne diseases were reported in Alabama in 2003, and 96% of the state's public water systems now meet federal drinking water standards. The state also saves money because fewer chemicals are needed to treat water that is less contaminated.

Mississippi Funded to Respond Quickly to Life-Threatening Meningitis Outbreak

Within a 9-day period in February 2003, six children aged 7–14 years living in one small town in Mississippi had a diagnosis of confirmed or probable invasive bacterial meningitis. This form of meningitis has a fatality rate of 40%. It also profoundly affects the long-term health of survivors, often causing permanent neurological deficits such as hearing loss, speech disorders, loss of limbs, mental retardation, and paralysis. The infection is spread through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions. The PHHS Block Grant quickly funded Mississippi to conduct activities critical to diagnosing and treating this disease. Over a period of 4 days, antibiotics were administered to all close contacts of the affected children. Vaccinations were offered to students, teachers, and staff members in the local school system, and the outbreak was contained. No fatalities occurred, and no secondary cases were identified.

Wisconsin Improves Access to Dental Health Care

Wisconsin uses part of its PHHS Block Grant to provide access to dental care for people who are uninsured and families who receive Medicaid. A mobile dental unit visits four low-income counties (Lincoln, Langlade, Forest, and Oneida) one week each month. Since the program began in 2001, more than 5,000 people have received dental care, and another 4,700 have received dental health education.

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